

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: JANATA PARTY CRISIS REACHES CRITICAL STAGE

REF: NEW DELHI 9764, NEW DELHI 9578

1. SUMMARY: THE DEVELOPING CRISIS IN THE JANATA PARTY
REACHED A CRITICAL STAGE YUNE 29 WHEN THE CABINET MET IN
SPECIAL SESSION TO CONSIDER ALLEGED ACTS OF INDISCIPLINE
BY HEALTH MINISTER RAJ NARAIN AND HOME MINISTER CHARAN
SINGH. PRIME MINISTER DESAI HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN
AUTHORIZED TO DEAL WITH THEM AT HIS DISCRETION. EARLY
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SPECULATION HELD OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE CABINET
HAD ASKED MORARJI TO SEEK THEIR RESIGNATIONS FROM THE
GOVERNMENT, BUT THIS WAS LATER DENIED. CHARAN SINGH
HIMSELF SPARKED THIS LATEST DEVELOPMENT BY STRONGLY
INDICTING THE GOVERNMENT (AND IMPLICITLY THE PM) FOR
FAILING TO PROSECUTE MRS. GANDHI. THE HOME MINISTER
SEEMS TO BE INCREASINGLY ISOLATED FROM THE MAINSTREAM

OF THE PARTY, AND HIS LATEST EFFORT AT BRINKMANSHIP SEEMS TO HAVE BACKFIRED. THE BULK OF THE JANATA LEADERSHIP NOW APPEARS TO BE BEHIND THE INCREASINGLY ASSERTIVE AND FEISTY PRIME MINISTER. BY GIVING HIM THE DISCRETION TO DEAL WITH RAJ NARAIN AND CHARAN SINGH, THE CABINET HAS LEFT THE DOOR OPEN TO PERMIT A LAST-MINUTE COMPROMISE, BUT THIS SEEMS LESS LIKELY THAN BEFORE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE DEVELOPING CRISIS WITHIN THE JANATA PARTY OVER HEALTH MINISTER RAJ NARAIN'S ANTICS (REFTELS) REACHED A CRITICAL STAGE TODAY (JUNE 29) WHEN THE UNION COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HELD AN "EMERGENCY" MEETING TO CONSIDER ALLEGED ACTS OF INDISCIPLINE BY HEALTH MINISTER RAJ NARAIN AND HIS MENTOR, HOME MINISTER CHARAN SINGH. THE LATEST INSTANCES COMPRISE AN UNAUTHORIZED SPEECH IN SIMLA BY RAJ NARAIN AND A BLISTERING INDICTMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT BY

CHARAN SINGH FOR DELAYING PROSECUTION OF MRS. GANDHI. ACCORDING TO THE INDIAN WIRE SERVICES, INFORMATION MINISTER ADVANI BRIEFED NEWSMEN AFTER THE TWO AND A HALF-HOUR LONG "EMERGENCY" CABINET MEETING IN DELHI AND SAID THAT THE MINISTERS WERE "UNANIMOUS" IN THEIR VIEWS. ADVANI SAID THAT THE CABINET HAS LEFT IT TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S DISCRETIONS AS TO HOW TO DEAL WITH THE MATTER. HE ALSO SAID THAT MORARJI SHORTLY WOULD WRITE LETTERS TO RAJ LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NARAIN AND CHARAN SINGH. EARLY PRESS REPORTS SPECULATED THAT THE CABINET HAD REQUESTED THE PM TO SEEK THE RESIGNATION FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TWO MINISTERS, BUT OFFICIAL SOURCES, ACCORDING TO THE UNI WIRE SERVICE, LATER CLARIFIED THAT THE ENTIRE MATTER HAD BEEN LEFT TO MORARJI'S DISCRETION.

3. AS OF LAST REPORT, THERE HAS NOT YET BEEN ANY REACTION FROM THE STILL-CONVALESCING HOME MINISTER OR FROM RAJ NARAIN, WHO IS CURRENTLY CONFERRING WITH JANATA ELDER J.P. NARAYAN IN PATNA. CHARAN SINGH, RAJ NARAIN AND THREE OTHER FULL-RANK MINISTERS WERE NOT PRESENT AT TODAY'S CABINET MEETING. (IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE CANCELLED HIS VISIT TO SRI LANKA IN ORDER TO ATTEND THIS SPECIAL MEETING IN DELHI.

4. THE PRIME MINISTER ISSUED THE CALL FOR THE "EMERGENCY" MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS LAST NIGHT SHORTLY AFTER CHARAN SINGH HAD FIRED OFF ANOTHER SALVO IN HIS ESCALATING FEUD WITH THE PM AND OTHER PARTY LEADERS. LATE ON JUNE 28, THE HOME MINISTER ISSUED A TOUGH STATEMENT CALLING FOR MRS. GANDHI'S IMMEDIATE ARREST AND TRIAL

BY A SPECIAL COURT THUS CONTRADICTING THE PRIME MINISTER WHO HAD SAID MRS. GANDHI SHOULD ONLY BE SUBJECT TO EXISTING LAWS AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURES. CHARAN SINGH TOOK THE GOVERNMENT TO TASK FOR FAILING TO ACT SOONER AGAINST THE FORMER PM, AN ACT OF OMISSION WHICH HE CLAIMED MADE THE JANATA LOOK LIKE "A PACK OF IMPOTENT PEOPLE WHO CAN- NOT GOVERN THE COUNTRY." THE HOME MINISTER'S BLUNT INDICTMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT WAS QUICKLY SEEN HERE BY JOURNALISTS AS A DIVERSIONARY TACTIC TO DEFLECT ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE FUROR CREATED BY THE ACTIONS OF HIS DISCIPLE, RAJ NARAIN. (THE MOST RECENT INSTANCE OF THE HEALTH MINISTER'S ANTICS OCCURRED JUNE 25 WHEN HE DEFIED PROHIBITORY ORDERS ISSUED BY THE JANATA STATE GOVERNMENT OF HIMACHAL PRADESH AND ADDRESSED A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RALLY IN SIMLA. THE PRIME MINISTER WAS REPORTED TO BE ANGERED AT RAJ NARAIN'S DEFIANCE OF THESE ORDERS AND DEMANDED AN EXPLANATION.)

5. IN THE DAYS SINCE OUR LAST REPORT, JANATA LEADERS HAVE ENGAGED IN A SERIES OF HECTIC CONFABULATIONS TO SEEK TO DEFUSE THE RAJ NARAIN CRISIS. AT ONE POINT, IT SEEMED THAT J.P. NARAYAN HIMSELF WOULD STEP IN TO OFFER A FACE-SAVING COMPROMISE FOR ALL THE PLAYERS. HOWEVER, IT APPEARS HERE THAT CHARAN SINGH REALIZED HIS INCREASING

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ISOLATION IN THE PARTY AND DECIDED TO TRY TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE BY RAISING THE MRS. GANDHI ISSUE. AT THE MOMENT, HIS TACTIC SEEMS TO HAVE BACKFIRED; IF ANYTHING, HIS IMPLIED CENSURE OF THE PRIME MINISTER FOR LAXITY IN PROSECUTING MRS. GANDHI APPEARS TO HAVE STRENGTHENED MORARJI'S HAND IN DEALING WITH THE HOME MINISTER.

6. CLEARLY, THE "EMERGENCY" CABINET MEETING TODAY WAS CALLED NOT TO DISCUSS THE SUBSTANCE OF CHARAN SINGH'S CHARGES CONCERNING THE FAILURE TO PROSECUTE MRS. GANDHI, BUT RATHER TO CONSIDER THE MEANS BY WHICH THE HOME MINISTER HAD PUBLICLY AIRED THEM. CHARAN SINGH'S
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BLUNT STATEMENT WAS NOT ONLY A DEFIANCE OF THE PRIME MINISTER BUT WAS ALSO A SERIOUS BREACH OF PARTY DISCIPLINE ABOUT WHICH THE JANATA LEADERSHIP HAS BECOME SO CONCERNED.

7. IN QUICKLY SUMMONING THE CABINET, THE PRIME MINISTER'S SWIFT RESPONSE TO CHARAN SINGH'S OPEN CHALLENGE CAUGHT MANY HERE SOMEWHAT BY SURPRISE. AS WE HAVE FREQUENTLY POINTED OUT IN THE PAST, MORARJI HAS PREFERRED TO ADOPT AN ALOOF ROLE IN INTERNAL PARTY AFFAIRS. HOWEVER, EVER SINCE HIS RETURN FROM THE U.S. ON JUNE 17 THE PM HAS BEEN IN A FEISTY, COMBATIVE AND ASSERTIVE MOOD. THUS, THE JANATA PARLIAMENTARY BOARD'S FIRM STAND AGAINST RAJ NARAIN'S INDISCIPLINE ON JUNE 22 (TO WHICH MORARJI AGREED) WAS APPLAUDED HERE AS CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAVE FINALLY RESOLVED TO DEAL STERNLY WITH THE TROUBLES WHICH PLAGUE THE PARTY. THIS HARDENED APPROACH ON THE PART OF THE PM HAS BECOME EVIDENT SINCE JUNE 22: AT A RALLY IN RAJASTHAN ON JUNE 25, MORARJI TOLD HIS AUDIENCE THAT RAJ NARAIN WAS FREE TO LEAVE THE GOVERNMENT IF HE FAILED TO OBSERVE PARTY DISCIPLINE. JANATA PRESIDENT CHANDRA SHEKHAR, THE ORIGINAL OBJECT OF ATTACK BY THE CHARAN SINGH FORCES,

HAS RESOLUTELY INSISTED THAT PARTY DISCIPLINE IS ESSENTIAL. HOWEVER, THIS STRONG STAND BY THE JANATA LEADERSHIP WULD NEVER HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THE CRUCIAL JANA SANGH ELEMENT. WE BEIEVE THAT MORARJI NOW FEELS ASSURED THAT THE JANA SANGHIS ARE FIRMLY BEHIND HIM IN HIS CONFRONTATION WITH CHARAN SINGH. TODAY'S CABINET DECISION IS CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT IN ANY SHOWDOWN THE JANA SANGH AND ALL OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE PARTY ARE LINED UP BEHIND MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO -- WHICH MEANS SUPPORTING THE PM.
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8. COMMENT: OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IS THAT MORARJI HAS THE OPTION TO SEEK THE RESIGNATIONS OF CHARAN SINGH AND RAJ NARAIN. IN GIVING THIS DISKRETION TO THEPM AND APPARENTLY NOT INSISTING THAT HE REQUEST THE IMMEDIATE RESIGNATION OF THE TWO MINISTERS, THE DABINET HASLEFT THE DOOR OPEN -- IF ONLY A CRACK -- TO ALLOW A LAST MINUTE COMPROMISE WHICH WOULD ENABLE THEM TO REMAIN IN THE CABINET. WITH THIS LATEST DEVELOPMENT, HWEVER, THE CHANCES FOR COMPROMISE SEEM LESS LIKELY THAN BEFORE. LESS CLEAR IS THE POTENTIAL IMPACT IN U.P., BIHAR AND HARAYNA, STATES LED BY BLD CHIEF MINISTERS SUPPOSEDLY LOYAL TO CHARAN SINGH.
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